

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

[REDACTED] April 6, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Visit of Chancellor Adenauer - Some Psychological Factors

All Soviet pronouncements indicate that the Federal Republic is likely to be the focal point of a Communist offensive during this year. One of the most serious dangers is the psychological exhaustion produced in the Federal Republic by two years of Soviet pressure and the last thirty years of German history. There are vague fears of being abandoned and equally vague yearnings for independent action. There is a feeling that the success of the Shirer book and the Eichman trial are not accidents: They are thought to reflect lower valuation of Germany as a nation and of German interests. Many Germans, including Adenauer, fear that we will make unwarranted (from the German point of view) concessions on the Oder-Neisse line and on Berlin. There has been a profound misunderstanding about the nature and motives of the reassessment of our strategy. A major objective of the forthcoming meeting should be to dispel this atmosphere in so far as is possible.

Since the State Department will be preparing papers on the current policy issues, I will confine myself to some of the psychological factors which seem to me to affect the conversations. These are: the personality of the Chancellor; his view of the German people; the psychological situation in Germany; and the special problem of the forthcoming German elections.

1. The Personality of the Chancellor

Like most outstanding and strong men Adenauer is a

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complex, even contradictory, personality. I shall not attempt to explain his character in detail but a summary of a few of his main traits may be useful.

a. He is a believer in simple maxims which he holds rigidly.

Adenauer's father was a non-commissioned officer -- a sociological type which in Germany epitomized the rigid Kantian concept of duty. His family was devoutly religious -- so much so that at the death of his infant brother Adenauer, then aged five, was required to offer a prayer of thanks that God had chosen to call his brother so early. Whatever the intensity of the Chancellor's own religious convictions, both his secular and religious upbringing have left him with a profound belief in certain basic "absolute" values.

b. He is nevertheless deeply convinced of the transitoriness of most political constructions -- particularly in Germany.

Adenauer grew up in Imperial Germany. He experienced three revolutions and an inflation: the collapse of the Empire, the overthrow of the Weimar Republic, the total disintegration of Germany. To an extent hard to understand for an American, he is conscious of, perhaps obsessed by, the possibility of tragedy. He feels that Germany is not strong enough morally or physically to maneuver independently. He is convinced that any attempt to do so must end in disaster.

c. He is tough and ruthless in domestic politics.

Whatever Adenauer's greatness in the foreign field -- and I believe it to be considerable -- domestically he is a tough, often a vicious, competitor. He treats his colleagues with hardly more respect than his opponents. This may be due to his belief in the correctness of his maxims; or to his disdain for most of the German political leaders.

Be that as it may,
He is a lonely eminence. Probably even his own party
will heave a sigh of relief when he steps down.

c. Adenauer's eminence in Germany is not undeserved.

Almost single-handedly he restored a sense of self-respect to a shattered nation. He has struggled valiantly to bring Germany into the Western community. He has built a measure of democratic consensus in a demoralized nation. His foreign policies have become accepted even by the opposition. Though I like Brandt personally -- and though a gain in Socialist strength would be favorable for us in the long run (particularly when they are running -- as now -- on a pro-Western platform) -- this does not detract from my admiration for the single-mindedness, restraint and skill of Adenauer which transformed Germany for the first time in this century into a responsible member of the Western community. On almost every foreign policy issue he has been proved right and his domestic opponents wrong. His judgment as to the limits of viable policy has proved wiser than that of many cleverer people. Adenauer is difficult. But many of these difficulties are the defects of great virtues. He has earned respect for a major historical achievement.

2. Adenauer's ambivalent attitude towards the German people.

Adenauer comes from a tradition to which the unification of Germany under Prussian aegis was highly distasteful. As a result, much of recent German history must seem to him a huge error, compounded by the shortsightedness and pettiness of German public life and the crimes of the Nazi period. The chief lesson he has drawn from that history is that moderation and a sense of proportion are not a forte of the Germans.

Much of Adenauer's rigidity is therefore due to his distrust of his own compatriots. The goal of his policy has been to tie

Germany so closely to the West in his life-time that the volatile tendencies of the German people have no chance of reasserting themselves. To talk to Adenauer about the wisdom of flexibility in the abstract is like telling a member of Alcoholics Anonymous that one Martini before dinner will not hurt him. Adenauer would rather err on the side of excessive loyalty to his allies than the policy of taking advantage of Germany's central position to play its neighbors off against each other. This is basically in our interest.

A few remarks about the psychological situation within Germany may be in order here.

3. The Psychological Problem of Germany.

A country which has lost two world wars, undergone three revolutions, committed the crimes of the Nazi era and which has seen its material wealth wiped out twice in a generation is bound to suffer from deep psychological scars. There is an atmosphere of hysteria, a tendency towards unbalanced actions. A German friend, a creative writer, said to me once that Germany alone of the major countries of Europe suffered no visible psychic shock after the war. It sublimated its problems in the frenzied effort to rebuild economically. But it remains a candidate for a nervous breakdown.

The fear of being left alone or sold out is, in some sense, a quest for emotional security. It is also a sign of great lack of self-confidence. This fear is magnified by a fantastic provincialism -- itself the product of the moral isolation from Europe lasting a generation -- which makes all world events seem to revolve around the problem of Germany.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The Problem of Confidence and NATO Strategy.

The chief conclusion to be drawn from the above is that the conversations with Adenauer should be considered as much a psychological as a political challenge. More important than any

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specific policy decision is to provide reassurance that the new Administration considers the Federal Republic an integral part of the Western community. Some comments on the Berlin problem along the lines of Mr. Acheson's memorandum on Berlin, particularly paragraphs 1 and 2, would seem extremely helpful. It may be helpful to stress the point that a separate U.S.-Soviet deal over Berlin without the concurrence of the Federal Republic will not be considered.

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3. The German Campaign

Both German candidates will undoubtedly seek to produce

the impression that they have a special relationship with the Administration. In particular, Adenauer is likely to campaign on the not unjustified claim of having established German-American relations on their present basis. Much as we should sympathize with him and much as he deserves our respect, we cannot cooperate in staking our whole position on one man, even less on a man of his age. I would therefore recommend that Chancellor Adenauer be warmly received as befits a staunch friend of the United States. At the same time, we should take care in any communique or in any statement to stress the close ties between the Federal Republic and the United States rather than the personal ties of the leading statesmen.

Henry A. Kissinger